

GATE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELING RESOURCE NEWSLETTER

May 2018 Edition

Julia Melodci, School Counselor

Greetings,

This is the May 2018 edition of the monthly GATE resource newsletters. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide educators with information, practical ideas, classroom interventions and strategies related to the specific characteristics and social-emotional needs of GT middle school students.

Perfectionism

This month's newsletter topic is perfectionism. Perfectionism in general has negative connotations, although it can be used in both healthy and unhealthy ways, also referred to as adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism. The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) mentions that approximately 20% of gifted children suffer from perfectionism to a degree that it causes problems. Maladaptive or unhealthy perfectionism can lead to serious conditions such as suicide, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, underachievement, etc. There is a fair amount of literature addressing this topic. It provides educators, parents, and children with information and strategies to help overcome unhealthy perfectionism and achieve personal and academic success.

<u>Featured Resources (attached):</u>	<u>Recommended Books/Websites:</u>
1. Perfectionism – article by NAGC	1. Letting Go of Perfect: Overcoming Perfectionism in Kids (2009), by Jill L. Adelson and Hope E. Wilson This book is a must-have resource for parents and teachers who want to help children overcome perfectionism and raise self-confidence.

2. **What's Wrong With Perfect? -**
article by Dr.
Sylvia Rimm

3. **Helping Gifted Students Move Beyond Perfectionism**
- article by
Thomas S.
Greenspoon

4. **Trying to do Well vs Perfectionism**
- from the book
What to Do When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough

5. **10 Tips for Combating Perfectionism**
- from book
The Gifted Teen Survival Guide

2. **What to Do When Good Enough Isn't Good Enough: The Real Deal on Perfectionism (2005), by Thomas S. Greenspoon**

This book addresses how people become perfectionists and gives practical coping skills to feel better. This is a wonderful resource for kids.

3. **Psychology Today - Perfectionism Test**

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/tests/personality/perfectionism-test>

This perfectionism test has 40 questions and takes about 20 minutes to complete. At the end, there is a free general report, and the option to get the detailed report for a fee.

Information & Publications

Perfectionism

It's not uncommon for high-ability children to also be perfectionists. Whether they worry about getting a drawing exactly right, earning all A's in school, or feeling helpless in fixing society's downfalls, approximately 20% of gifted children suffer from perfectionism to the degree it causes problems.

All perfectionism is not bad. Setting personal standards and pursuing excellence is important and healthy in many life situations. However, perfectionism can become unhealthy when it causes stress, pain, illness, procrastination, and underachievement. While not inclusive, some causes of perfectionism include a desire to please others, early successes and no failures at a young age, and difficulty setting realistic goals.

Healthy perfectionism

Doing the best you can with the time and tools you have--and then moving on

Setting high personal standards with a gentle acceptance of self

Managing behaviors to not interfere with daily life

Unhealthy perfectionism

Emphasizing and/or rewarding performance over other aspects of life

Perceiving that one's work is never good enough

Feeling continually dissatisfied about one's work--which can lead to depression, anxiety, and other physical symptoms

Feeling guilty if not engaged in meaningful work at all times

Having a compulsive drive to achieve, where personal value is based on what is produced or accomplished

Tips for Parents & Teachers in Managing Perfectionism

Watch for signs of unhealthy perfectionism and intervene if necessary

Adults should model a healthy approach and be aware of their own predispositions toward compulsive excellence

Refrain from setting high, non-negotiable standards

Emphasize the effort and process, not the end-result

Resources

NAGC Publications

For Administrators

For Educators

For Parents

Motivation and Learning

Planning for Summer

Social & Emotional Issues

Young Bright Children

Gifted Children's Bill of Rights

Games, Toys and Gifted Children

National Parenting Gifted Children Week 2015

Recursos Para los Padres de Familia

Starting a Parent Group

For University Professionals

Gifted Education Practices

Gifted By State

NAGC Online Store

NAGC Gifted & Talented Resources Directory

Do not withhold affection, support, or encouragement if goals are not met

Teach your gifted child to manage perfectionistic behaviors and focus on positive self-talk



WHAT'S WRONG WITH PERFECT?

Excellence is Excellent

We want our children to strive for excellence. It is attainable and provides a good sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, excellence is advantageous whether it involves children's school grades, ice skating, music, art, gymnastics, written work, or many other skills. It sets high standards and opens doors to opportunity for talented children.



*Good, better, best
Never let it rest,
'Til your good is better
And your better best.*

The Pressures of Perfectionism

The pressures of perfectionism may lead to high positive achievement motivation or to underachievement. In very important ways, perfectionism is slightly different than the motivation for excellence. That small dissimilarity prevents perfectionistic children from ever feeling good enough about themselves and precludes their taking risks when they fear the results will not be perfect.

*When perfectionism becomes
pervasive and compulsive, it goes
beyond excellence.*

Many talent areas demand excellence. Thus, the striving for perfection in an area of expertise may be a healthy development of talent. However, when perfectionism becomes pervasive and compulsive, it goes beyond excellence. It leaves no room for error. It provides little satisfaction and much self-criticism because the results never feel good enough to the doer. Perfection is impossible for children who apply impossibly high standards to too many activities too frequently.

They may procrastinate or feel anxious and fearful when they believe they cannot meet their high standards. They may experience stomachaches, headaches, and depression when they worry that they make mistakes or don't perform as well as their perfectionistic expectations. Sometimes they avoid accomplishing the most basic work and make excuses and blame others for their problems. They may even become defiant and rebellious to hide their fear of failure.

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In This Issue

- ✓ *What's Wrong With Perfect?*
- ✓ *Helping Your Children Cope With Divorce*
- ✓ *Stepparenting*
- ✓ *Suggestions for Single Parents*
- ✓ *Student Stepping Stones – How to Plan a Long-Term Assignment and Fight Procrastination*

Some children may only be specifically or partially perfectionistic. For example, some are perfectionistic about their grades and intellectual abilities; others may be perfectionistic about their clothes and their appearance; some are perfectionistic about their athletic prowess or their musical or artistic talent; some are perfectionistic about their room organization and cleanliness; and some children (and incidentally, also some adults) are perfectionistic in two or three areas, although there are some areas that apparently don't pressure or bother them at all. Those children who have not generalized perfectionism to all parts of their lives are more likely to be healthy perfectionists.

Perfectionism Affects Others

Unhealthy perfectionism not only affects the perfectionist but also affects those around them. In their efforts to feel very good about themselves, perfectionists may unconsciously cause others to feel less good. Spouses, siblings, or friends of



perfectionists may feel angry and oppositional and may not understand their own irrational feelings. Sometimes family members feel depressed and inadequate because they can't ever measure up to the impossibly high standards of their family perfectionist. Often times, there is an underachiever in the family to balance out

the perfectionist. The underachiever feels like they can never do as well as their perfect sibling so they say to themselves, "Why try?"

Perfectionists may unconsciously put others down and point out how imperfect they are.

In order for perfectionists to maintain their perfect status, they may unconsciously put others down and point out how imperfect they are, usually in a very "nice" way. For example, perfect sister Sally may say, "I don't understand why my brother isn't even trying to do his homework." Giving others continuous

unsolicited advice seems to reassure perfectionists of how intelligent they are. They are so determined to be impossibly perfect that causing others to feel bad has an unconsciously confirming effect on their own perfectionism. The perfectionistic spouse, in his or her effort to feel best, may also cause his or her partner to feel inadequate or less intelligent.

What Causes Perfectionism?

The pressures children feel to be perfect may originate from extreme praise they hear from the adults in their environment. The pressures may also come from watching their parents model perfectionistic characteristics, or they may simply stem from their own continuously successful experiences, which they then feel they must live up to. Genetics and temperament also make their contribution.

Particularly certain activities like ballet, gymnastics, and music encourage perfect performance, and children involved in these activities strive to meet the high standards expected of them. This may be healthy, or children may generalize these expectations of perfection to other parts of their lives, and perfectionism can become problematic.



See Jane Win Research

When we studied the childhoods of more than 1,000 successful women for our book *See Jane Win*, we found that thirty percent of the women viewed themselves as perfectionistic when they were in high school. For the most part, their perfectionism was positive. Approximately half of the women felt pressured in high school, but they typically liked feeling pressure and considered it to be a personal pressure.

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NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS

Sylvia Rimm On Raising Kids is published quarterly. The introductory price is \$16/year; \$20 thereafter. A special school district rate to copy for all the parents is available.

For more information, or to order:

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Charlotte Otto*, Vice President at Procter and Gamble, initially struggled with perfectionism in her career. At first she struggled with accepting criticism but realized how to improve with the constructive help she received instead of letting it debilitate her. She learned to affirm instead of blaming herself.

There were some exceptions. For example, television news anchor Donna Draves quit many childhood activities shortly after starting them. She would tell her parents that the activity was "boring." Donna admitted in her interview that she would drop out if she was not "best" in the activity. She would never attempt activities like sports and math because she considered her brother "best" at those. Fortunately, she was "best" at speech, and she carried excellence in speech to her career. Donna's perfectionism even affected her eating habits. Although she was a size three, she continuously compared herself to two other girls in her class who were "skinnier" than her. She felt unattractive unless she was the thinnest. Donna is successful today, but the near pitfalls of perfectionism could easily have derailed her and prevented her from "making the mark" she so wished to make.



Violinist Pamela Frank* described herself as perfectionistic, but her parents taught her how to deal with her mistakes with a sense of humor. When eight-year-old Pamela made a mistake while performing for her grandparents at their home, she retreated to a backroom to pout. Her parents broke into her pouting by saying, "So who do you think you are, Itzhak Perlman?" Laughter often dispels the most serious perfectionism.



* From *How Jane Won* by Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D., 2001, Crown Publishing.

How Parents and Teachers Can Help Perfectionists

- ➔ Help kids to understand that they can feel satisfied when they've done *their* best; not necessarily *the* best. Praise statements that are enthusiastic but more moderate convey values that children can achieve; for example, "excellent" is better than "perfect," and "You're a good thinker" is better than "You're brilliant." Also, avoid comparative praise: "You're the best" makes kids think they must be the best to satisfy you.
- ➔ Explain to children that they may not be learning if all of their work in school is perfect. Help them understand that mistakes are an important part of challenge.
- ➔ Teach appropriate self-evaluation and encourage children to learn to accept criticism from adults and other students. Explain that they can learn from the recommendations of others.
- ➔ Read biographies together that demonstrate how successful people experienced and learned from failures. Emphasize their failure and rejection experiences as well as their successes. Help children to identify with the feelings of those eminent persons as they must have felt when they experienced their rejections. Stories from *How Jane Won* will be helpful to discuss.
- ➔ Share your own mistakes and model the lessons you learned from your mistakes. Talk to yourself aloud about learning from your mistakes so children understand your thinking.
- ➔ Humor helps perfectionists. (Remember Pamela Frank's story.) Help children to laugh at their mistakes.
- ➔ Teach children empathy and how bragging affects others. Help them to put themselves in the position of others. Say, "Suppose you messed up on your piano recital and Jennifer, the winner, told you that she had her best performance ever. How would you feel?"

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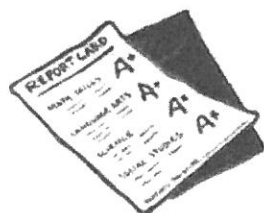
- ➔ Show children how to congratulate others on their successes. They will feel they are coping better as they congratulate others.

- ➔ Teach children routines, habits, and organization, but help them to understand that their habits should not be so rigid that they can't change them. Purposefully break routines so your children are not enslaved by them. For example, if they make their beds daily, permit them to skip a chore on a day when you're in a hurry. If you read to them at night and it's late, insist they go to sleep without reading. Occasional breaks in routines will model flexibility and prevent them from feeling compulsive about habits.



- ➔ Teach children creative problem-solving strategies and how to brainstorm for ideas that will keep their self-criticism from interfering with their productivity.
- ➔ Explain to children that there is more than one correct way to do most everything.
- ➔ If your child is an underachiever and avoids effort because he fears not achieving perfection, help him to gradually increase his effort and show him how that relates to his progress. Emphasize that effort counts.

- ➔ If your child is a high achiever, but overstudies for fear of not receiving an A+, help her to gradually study a little less to show her it has only a little effect on her grade. Help her to feel satisfied with her excellent grades with the reasonable amount of study involved. She needs to balance work with fun.



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WEBSITES**

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www.seejanewin.com

- ➔ Be a role model of healthy excellence. Take pride in the quality of your work but don't hide your mistakes or criticize yourself constantly. Congratulate yourself when you've done a good job, and let your children know that your own accomplishments give you satisfaction. Don't overwork. You, too, need to have some fun and relaxation.
- ➔ If your child's perfectionism is preventing accomplishment, or if your child shows symptoms of anxiety related to perfectionism, like stomachaches, headaches, or eating disorders, get professional psychological help for your child and your family.

The dilemma for parents and teachers is to balance helping children to be successful and "good kids" without also causing them to be burdened by the negative side effects of too much pressure to be the best. The childhood rhyme in the introduction of this article summarizes the problem well. We want our children to grow up to work hard and take pride in their work, but if they "never let it rest," they will never feel the satisfaction they have earned.

Family Achievement Clinic **Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D., Director**

Family Achievement Clinic specializes in working with capable children who are not performing to their abilities in school. Gifted children are the clinic's specialty. The clinic also offers a comprehensive range of psychological services centered on children, adolescents, and their families. Services include therapy for underachievement syndrome, attention deficit disorders, anxieties, and oppositional problems; as well as parenting and marriage therapy, divorce counseling, and career planning.

For appointments,
Cleveland, OH 216-839-2273
Hartland, WI 800-795-7466

Helping Gifted Students Move Beyond Perfectionism

Thomas S. Greenspon

Minnesota Institute for Contemporary
Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis

Tom Greenspon is a Psychologist, author, Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice in Minneapolis with his wife, Barbara. He and Barbara are former Co-Presidents of the Minnesota Council for the Gifted and Talented.

We seem to be living in a winner-take-all, second-place-is-for-losers culture. Learning from mistakes and doing a worthy, effortful, ethical job takes a back seat to the goal of being Number One. Intense competition for the best grades and for entry into the best schools and careers has made anxiety common—possibly most pointedly among gifted students. Fear of failure is rampant. In this atmosphere, while some students take mistakes or failures in stride and learn from them, others are devastated by them, becoming full of worry and self-reproach. What insights into this problem might allow you as a teacher to help such students?

What we're talking about here is perfectionism—a simultaneous intense desire for perfection and intense fear of imperfection. We see it in many "flavors": the overworked, over-committed, straight-A, award-winning high achiever who is always ahead of schedule and always volunteering for more work; the quiet, hesitant student who doesn't try new things for fear of getting them wrong or looking foolish; the procrastinator, who we discover puts off doing assignments because of fears that something won't be done perfectly. Our impulse is to say, "Don't worry so much! The effort is

what's important. Everyone makes mistakes. Who says you have to be perfect?" We're appalled when such reasonable suggestions have so little effect. Why is this?

In my decades-long practice of psychotherapy with individuals, couples, and families—the majority of whom are in the gifted community—I've learned that perfectionism is more than just what we can observe of a person's behavior or thoughts. To understand perfectionism, and therefore to be more able to help, we need to understand its psychology. That is, we need to understand a perfectionistic person's emotional or affective world. If we continue to analyze from outside of an individual's perspective, we are prone to misconstrue the perfectionism in highly successful perfectionistic people as "healthy" or "adaptive," and we are likely to confuse the many positive personality characteristics of perfectionistic people, such as conscientiousness, persistence, and dedication, with some kind of positive perfectionism. Perfectionistic people, though, do not see their chronic, pervasive anxiety about mistakes as positive or healthy. Instead, their experience is like what the author Anna Quindlen once referred to as a "backpack full of bricks."

To understand perfectionism, let's

consider three basic elements of human psychology.

1 Human beings are meaning-makers. Though it isn't with conscious effort, keeping our everyday world consistently organized and meaningful allows us to go about our business in a coherent way so that we can accomplish what we set out to do. The particular way we organize and make sense of our experience is profoundly shaped by our interactions with others, particularly with those to whom we most closely and consistently relate. These consistent relationship patterns point us toward a set of emotional convictions about who we are and how we fit in during our developmental years. As we grow, these patterns become firmly established as our sense of reality. If we feel liked and understood, we see ourselves as healthy and competent, with many reasons to feel hopeful about life. If we feel judged or disliked—or if people around us seem happiest only when we succeed at something—we tend to see ourselves as only conditionally acceptable. Then we believe we have to be highly successful to be most accepted. Perfectionistic people have particular emotional convictions about mistakes. Making a mistake means being inherently

defective and therefore personally unacceptable. That's their sense of reality.

2 Affects, or feelings, are the essential motivators of human behavior—not internal drives or developmental potentials. In the simplest terms, we act to obtain comfort, safety, connection, affirmation, and pleasure, for example. We also act to avoid feelings such as pain, sadness, disgust, fear, and loneliness. This behavior is called *affect regulation*, and we do it both on our own and with the help of others. The chronic struggle for perfection is a means of regulating the fear of making a mistake, for mistakes imply defectiveness and rejection. It is also a way to manage—or to avoid—the feelings of shame that this sense of defectiveness and difference reflects.

3 Connection to others is vital to emotional and even physical well-being throughout life. Our ability to experience mutual bonds, based on our capacity for empathic attunement to the experience of others, is what allowed us to survive as a comparatively small, slow, weak species. Connection is what has allowed us to build societies and cultures. Threats to our sense of connection and acceptability to others have powerful effects on our self-esteem and sense of self. Because of intellectual differences from others, and all that implies, gifted kids can be quite vulnerable to threats of disconnection and being treated as an "other." For perfectionistic people, an emotional conviction that making mistakes threatens acceptability and connection to others powerfully motivates the struggle to be perfect.

In summary, perfectionism is, emotionally, a self-esteem issue, with a sense of shame at its roots. Perfectionistic people understand mistakes to mean that something is wrong with them, and that they

are therefore less acceptable to others. The resulting anxiety about failure is what motivates them to push, relentlessly, for perfection. It is this anxiety that sharply differentiates a person who strives for excellence from one who is perfectionistic. Perfectionism is like an airplane wing with leading and trailing edges. The leading edge is conscientious effort, commitment to doing something well, and growing as a result. The trailing edge, without which there is no wing, is the intense anxiety about what it means to be less than perfect or to fail. It is this pervasive anxiety that makes rational suggestions to change their thinking so difficult for perfectionistic people to hear. Such suggestions are usually experi-

a way to contain anxieties. These perceived threats can range from parental displeasure, to feelings of differentness from others, to feelings of powerlessness, and to loss of personal agency regarding life at school or in the world at large. Although perfectionism is pervasive in most perfectionistic people's lives, some gifted students may seem perfectionistic only in school since that's where they have the best chance for perfection.

How to Help: Antidotes to Perfectionism

With this understanding of the psychological origins of perfectionism, what can you as a teacher do to help? It is certainly reasonable to explain to students that you are

not expecting perfection, and that putting forth effort, grappling with problems, and learning from mistakes is actually the royal road to growth and competence. Beyond this message, however, you can more directly address the self-esteem issues and the anxieties perfectionistic students are likely to have. What follows is not a list of discrete interventions, but rather the elements I consider necessary for creat-

ing an environment of acceptance. These elements can help you develop a sensibility about the problem of perfectionism in the classroom. The idea is that if students can feel a sense of acceptance and connection, they will feel more comfortable with the risk-taking involved in learning and growing.

1 Empathy. While perfectionism looks irrational and self-defeating to an outside observer, helping perfectionistic children needs to begin with an exploration of how they experience their world—what it means to them to fall short of perfection. A famous post-Freudian psychoanalyst called this kind of empathic exploration "vicarious introspection." If private

"If students can feel a sense of acceptance and connection, they will feel more comfortable with the risk-taking involved in learning and growing."

enced as one more expectation, or judgment, and one more reminder that they aren't good enough.

There is no evidence that gifted individuals are more perfectionistic, as a group, than others, and there is certainly no evidence that perfectionism is an essential part of giftedness itself. That said, many gifted students come from families that have high expectations for achievement. The message they hear, or sense, is "You're very smart, so there must be something wrong with you if you aren't doing exceptionally well." Societal expectations of gifted people frequently echo these messages. In addition, emotional threats perceived by the gifted kids who are highly sensitive can motivate perfectionistic strivings as

conversation is possible, ask a perfectionistic student questions like these: "What makes being perfect seem so important?" "How does it feel to make a mistake?" "What would others (parents, teachers, friends) think if you made a mistake?" Ask about feelings that you might observe: "You seem nervous when you're answering a question. Is that how you're feeling?" "Can you say what it is that you're afraid of?" You can ask with an attitude of curiosity rather than judgment. The fears and shame felt by perfectionistic people may be based on perceptions that can be challenged, but they are also very real. Recognizing and accepting these feelings is an important step toward having a student feel more understood, personally accepted, and capable of change.

2 Self-reflection. Gifted high schoolers who are straight-A students sometimes make this kind of complaint: "If I make a B on a test, I'll come into class and the teacher will say, 'What happened to you?!' like I've suddenly become incompetent!" It's important to encourage kids to achieve their potential; however, it's also important to avoid implying that something is broken if mistakes are made. It helps when teachers can summon the courage to self-reflect about whether they might be contributing to a child's perfectionism. It's not a "blame game"; many things contribute to a child's character and personality. However, as a teacher you can attempt to figure out how the situation for a perfectionistic student developed. Then you might be able to figure out how to help them move in a different direction. You can ask yourself, "Am I frequently judgmental? Do I focus more on what can be done better than on what has been done well?" Your self-awareness may help you help a student move past perfectionism. If you aren't sure, you can ask yourself, "Do I seem to be saying that if a student makes a mistake, it's not OK?" If that is true, an apology to the perfectionistic student is

a strong message that mistakes are simply mistakes, and that we can pay attention to them, learn from them, be OK with each other, and work together to move on.

3 Encouragement. Feeling liked and accepted forms a secure emotional base for trying new things and risking failure. Creating this sense of security can be as simple as remembering to tell students often what you like and appreciate about them. Give them sincere and genuine feedback. Focus on who they are rather than what they do. It's fine to celebrate accomplishments. However, noticing and affirming a student's conscientiousness, persistence, taking things seriously, thoughtfulness, and real effort—all qualities present in the leading edge of perfectionism—goes a long way toward building the secure base from which the student can risk doing something new. Affirmation also makes it easier for a student to hear critical comments as something directed at their work, rather than at their person. This shift in perspective may be a major step toward dealing with mistakes without shame and toward healing an existing sense of shame.

4 Dialogue. Healing takes place in the presence of dialogue. Conversations conducted on an ongoing basis can consist simply of brief check-ins about feelings, expectations, and concerns. These conversations can help students feel heard, understood, accepted, and affirmed. In that safe environment, you can suggest that they relax a bit and begin to learn from inevitable mistakes. If your time and the student's attitude make conversation possible, remember to check in again as time goes on. You can ask if the checking in feels intrusive; your continuing interest will probably feel supportive instead.

Teachers have a steep climb in their efforts to help perfectionistic students. The origins of perfectionism are outside of the classroom, and the roots are deep. It is helpful to involve parents in the ongoing dialogue. They may or may not be

willing to help. Remember that they may have their own perfectionistic burdens, and hearing that their child is having a problem may be difficult for them. Often, though, parents are already aware of the issue and welcome a joint effort to work on it. You might tell them that you have noticed that their child has some anxiety about tests, or assignments, or class participation, and that you're wondering if they observe these behaviors at home. You might also suggest some reading. Ideally, they will note and talk about helpful suggestions with each other and with their child. Such conversations can be a good way to acquaint them with resources and also a good way to form empathic bonds and a joint sense of purpose and to set the stage for growth.

You can find more information about perfectionism and these suggestions in the books listed below. It takes courage to initiate the conversations described here. Since immediate results are unusual, you may have to struggle with your own perfectionistic tendencies while you wait for change. However, you may have launched a process that will ultimately allow students to begin to think differently about themselves. This result will be well worth your efforts. **TNP**

Suggested Readings:

Greenspon, T. S. (2012). *Moving past perfect: How perfectionism may be holding back your kids (and you!) and what you can do about it.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing. For parents, teachers, and families.

Greenspon, T. S. (2007). *What to do when "good enough" isn't good enough: The real deal on perfectionism.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing. For middle schoolers and their families.

Trying to Do Well	Perfectionism
Doing the research you have to do for a project, working hard on it, turning it in on time, and feeling good about what you learned.	Writing your report over three times, staying up two nights in a row, and handing it in late because you had to get it right (and still feeling bad about your report).
Studying for a test, taking it with confidence, and feeling good about your score of 9 out of 10, or getting a B+ instead of an A.	Cramming at the last minute, taking the test with sweaty palms, and feeling bad about your B+ because a friend got an A.
Choosing to work on group projects because you enjoy learning from different people's experiences and ways of doing things.	Always working alone because no one can do as good a job as you—and you're not about to let anyone else slide by on your A.
Accepting an award with pride, even though your name is misspelled on it. (You know it can be fixed later.)	Being grumpy about the award because the officials didn't get your name right.
Getting together with people who are interesting, likable, and fun to be with.	Refusing to be with people who aren't star athletes, smart, and popular.
Being willing to try new things, even when they're a little scary, and learning from your experiences and mistakes.	Avoiding experiences because you are terrified of making mistakes—especially in public.
Keeping your room cleaner and neater, making your bed more often, and putting your clothes away.	Not being able to leave the room until the bed and room are just so.
Joining a soccer team and playing two or three times a week to have fun and compete with other teams.	Taking lessons as often as you can, practicing every day, and not feeling satisfied until you can beat every other team in your league.

10 Tips for Combating Perfectionism

1. Be average for a day. Allow yourself to be messy, late, incomplete . . . imperfect. Then celebrate your success.
2. Get involved in activities that are not graded or judged—activities that focus on process, not product.
3. Take a risk. Sign up for a course with a reputation for being challenging. Start a conversation with someone you don't know. Do an assignment or study for a test without overdoing it. Alter your morning routine. Start a day without a plan.
4. Give yourself permission to make at least three mistakes a day.
5. Stop using the word "should" in your self-talk. Remove "I have to" from your conversation and change the self-talk to "I choose to . . ."
6. Share a weakness or limitation with a friend. Recognize that he or she doesn't think any less of you as a result.
7. Acknowledge that your expectations of yourself might be too high, even unrealistic.
8. Savor your past accomplishments. Write about how good they made you feel.
9. Ask your friends to help you "cure" your perfectionism. Perhaps they can give you a sign or a word when they notice you are being a perfectionist.
10. Join the human race. It's less lonely when we accept our own and others' imperfections and feel part of life.

If you need more help combating your perfectionism, talk with your teacher, school counselor, psychologist, or social worker. Explain your situation and ask for suggestions.

The Matter of Your Mindset

One thing that often happens to gifted kids when they are young is that adults tell them constantly how smart they are. When you brought home your piles of papers in elementary school with stars or top grades on them, well-meaning parents or grandparents would extol the extent of your brain. They'd say things like, "How did you get to be so smart?" or they'd squeeze your cheek and predict that "your fine mind will take you far in life!" Little did they know that these constant compliments to your mind's prowess could actually serve to *inspire* perfectionism and undercut your future confidence and success.